

Computerization – The Most Powerful Tool for Businesses Today

The computer is the most powerful tool to establish and/or intensify a company's competitive advantage.

While the computer is a "tool" rather than a discipline, it is such an important, time saving tool that its proper and strategic use in modern business is critical to maximize information access and profitable decision making.

Small businesses today face growing inventory requirements, increased customer expectations, rising costs and intense competition. Moreover, if you plan to do business with the federal government you will need electronic commerce capability.

Computers can provide information that leads to better returns on investment. At the same time, they help you cope with the many other pressures of your business. Computers are not cure-alls, however, and considerable care should be given to:

- (1) deciding if you need one,
- (2) selecting the best system (or personal computer) for your business,
- (3) selecting the most relevant software for your needs, and
- (4) ensuring that you can easily operate the system.

It has been said that "to err is human, but to really foul things up requires a computer." No matter how many or what type computers your business may have, they are machines and subject to failure. Make sure you back up your computer files!

Use a tape drive or a Zip drive to back up all the data and programs on your computers or on your network computer. There are many brands available so the four things you need to compare are price, features, compatibility and ease of installation.

Here are a couple more backup tips:

- 1) It is great to backup your system, but if you leave the disk lying next to the computer, and then have it destroyed, it will not do you much good. Store your backup disk away from your computer and even outside the office if concerned about fire.
- 2) Back up your system regularly. Can you afford to lose a month's data since your last backup? A week's data?
- 3) Remember that backups are machines also, and if your data is so important that you could not do without it, consider the old fashion way, printing.

It pays to be cautious when it comes to the lifeblood of your business--information. There is NOTHING worse then trying to install new software and having your computer has turned into a creature from hell on you. Here are a few tips to help limit your chances of business interruptions or data loss disasters AND help you keep on a friendly basis with your computer.

Make sure you back everything up first. Before installing any software program, operating system or upgrade, perform a complete backup of your current system. This step is extremely important when the software you're installing affects or replaces your operating system. Include everything, especially software you may not wish to install separately should the need arise. Be sure to include all system files and any work files that could become lost or damaged.

If in doubt--use a professional. Don't try to "go it alone." It's far better to seek assistance than to risk damaging or destroying equipment or files or crashing your system.

You may be tempted to put off upgrading or buying new equipment--after all, every year, the machines get more powerful, and the options more plentiful. But if you wait, you trade the dollars you save for the price of slower performance and possibly fewer software choices. So when

should you upgrade your equipment? Here are some guidelines:

The basic rule of thumb is this: Start with what you want to accomplish. If your computer doesn't do it well, it's time to look at new solutions.

If obsolescence is a concern, be comforted by the fact that you don't have to upgrade every time a manufacturer makes an improvement. Assess key improvements-such as faster modems, improved processors, and better monitors-that truly impact performance and go from there. And if you don't want to invest in a whole new system, upgrading individual components such as your computer's memory, processor, and hard disk can be an affordable way to boost your PC's performance-and your productivity.

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